

PROPORTIONS AND IDENTITY: THE AESTHETIC ASPECT OF SYMMETRY

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The paper seeks to remove a confusion. Symmetry exhibits unity by its associated invariance; yet it is also claimed to reveal a form of beauty, namely, harmony, which requires a variety of elements. By adhering to a strict distinction between the ratio of the identity relation, that is, the unit, and other ratios (proportions) the confusion becomes manifest. Symmetry is the embodiment of the identity relation; it therefore cannot present harmonious relations which require differentiations and distinctions. To substantiate this claim the paper considers the formless void ~ Chaos. Contrary to the common view, it is argued that the state of chaos possesses the ultimate symmetry since it can withstand as it were all transformations. The extreme case of the formless void demonstrates conclusively that symmetry has *on its own* no aesthetic value. However, as an instrument of inquiry, symmetry can serve as a key tool for furthering scientific and artistic creation. In science and in art symmetry may facilitate the grasp of essences of reality. Examples from art (Morandi and Giacometti) and science (Dirac, Einstein, Hardy and Poincare) are presented and analyzed with a view to substantiating these claims. Some of the examples show that there is much misunderstanding and imprecise notions as to the role of aesthetics in science. An attempt is finally made to address this issue in view of the above analysis.